

## The RFA, People and Communities

Around 300,000 people live in the Central Highlands region. The community is relatively young, with about half the population under the age of 35. The main industries are manufacturing, community services, and wholesale and retail trading.

The Social Assessment for the RFA used workshops, case studies, statistical analysis and a telephone and mail-out survey. This provided a snapshot of self-reliant and cohesive communities proud of the beauty and value of the forests, appreciative of the safety and friendliness of rural life, and committed to tackling shared problems like youth unemployment.

According to the social assessment:

- one in three people surveyed by phone in the region say the area in which they live is very dependent on the region's timber industry;
- eleven per cent indicated they rely on forest industries in that if these industries did not exist in the area they would have to live somewhere else;
- eighty per cent are estimated to have visited native forests in the last year for activities like bushwalking, picnicking, sightseeing and camping;
- \$51 million in annual household expenditure is generated directly through employees within timber processing industries which receive timber resources from the region. While the APP Maryvale Mill is the single most significant industry contributor, timber processing industries at other centres including Alexandra and Heyfield also contribute to generating significant levels of household expenditure through their employees;
- fifty-four per cent of tourism businesses within the Central Highlands indicated that over 80 per cent of their income is dependent upon visitors to the area, with an estimated 36 per cent of visitors coming to the Central Highlands specifically to visit areas of native forest. Tourism operators nominated Healesville, Lilydale, Eildon, Yea, Kinglake, Alexandra and Warburton as the towns most likely to attract visitors to the region.

The RFA will bring major benefits to the communities of the Central Highlands as increased certainty for forest based industries translates into job opportunities and increased expenditure in the region.

For example, with the further value adding proposed for sawmills within the region, sawmill activities could contribute nearly 1800 jobs to the Victorian economy and \$248 million to State output by 2005-06.

The flow-on effect is expected to stimulate growth in a range of sectors, from service provision to small business.

Based on projected increase in visit days to parks and State forest in the region, it is estimated that forest recreation may generate \$125 million in direct local expenditure by 2000 and \$221 million to the regional economy when flow on effects from direct recreation expenditure are taken into account.